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News Items from the School of Education of the University of Chicago

AN INVESTIGATION OF DESIRABLE AND UNDESIRABLE READING SELECTIONS.

School men have long realized that much time and effort are wasted in reading classes as a result of poorly selected subject-matter. Some selections are undesirable for use in any grade. Other selections are excellent if used in certain grades and may be wholly inappropriate in other grades. In order to determine standards for use in eliminating undesirable selections, in choosing valuable selections, and in assigning superior selections to appropriate grades, an investigation of the content of the elementary-school course in reading was made by Willis L. Uhl, Ph.D., while a candidate for the Doctor's degree in the University of Chicago.

In order to secure information for use in formulating standards, reactions to reading selections were obtained from approximately three thousand teachers and five hundred pupils. The teachers who participated in the investigation were located in eighty cities of twenty-six states. Likewise, the pupils who took part in this investigation represented numerous population groups. The data gave, therefore, a fairly reliable index of the attitude of the teachers and pupils of this country toward the reading material now in use.

From five hundred and fifty to one thousand selections were judged by the teachers of each grade. The judgments indicate the degree of success of given selections in particular grades and, in addition, the characteristics of selections which make for success or failure in these grades. Teachers and pupils in all grades mentioned difficulty of diction or content, unfamiliarity with the subject-matter, and difficulty with the symbols of the selections more frequently than any other undesirable qualities. Among the desirable qualities, interesting action and interesting characters

were mentioned most frequently. Teachers find that selections which include these qualities are better for didactic purposes and as examples for literary merit than selections primarily didactic or primarily literary, and only secondarily of intrinsic interest. The relative importance of undesirable qualities varies from grade to grade.

In every grade the teachers agree unanimously that some selections are very inappropriate, and that other selections are equally appropriate. Difficulties frequently result from an attempt to have pupils read too difficult material, although some widely used easy selections are found unsatisfactory in all grades. Superior reading selections usually possess several appeals and are often appropriate for use in several successive grades. Although the traditional informational selections are among the least successful reported by teachers, it was found that informational selections, carefully written for school use, challenge as much interest and attention as any of the distinctly literary selections. It is believed, therefore, that lack of interest in certain informational selections is due to the form in which the selections are written, or to the presence of poorly selected subject-matter.

The data collected from teachers and pupils made possible the formulation of standards for judging reading selections. These standards show the relative prominence of desirable qualities of reading selections in the different grades. Because these standards are based on teachers' and pupils' statements, it is believed that they possess large significance. The results of this investigation and the standards which were prepared are being published in a bulletin of the University of Wisconsin.